

Data Analysis Helps Secure Program to Combat S.C. Women's Health Issues

Issue

Mrs. C., a 48-year old S.C. African-American woman, has a high-stress job with low pay and no health insurance. She has severe hypertension, has been hospitalized twice for the problem and is at risk for heart attack and stroke. Though she has a family history of diabetes, she has not been screened for high cholesterol and diabetes. There are thousands of women like Mrs. C scattered across South Carolina, who are at high risk for multiple chronic diseases and have no access to the health care system except in emergencies.

Heart disease and stroke are the number two and three killers of women younger than 65 in South Carolina, second only to cancer. S.C. African-American women ages 45 to 64 are almost twice as likely to die from heart disease and three times more likely to die from a stroke than white women. The majority of women in this age group had one or more risk factors for heart disease, including diabetes, hypertension or high cholesterol, according to 2005 data.

Intervention

To reduce the appalling heart disease and stroke mortality and address the needs of women ages 45 to 64 at risk who don't have health insurance, South Carolina applied for WISEWOMAN funding. Collecting and tracking data that accurately describes the severity of heart disease and stroke's impact on women and the impact of risk factors can be challenging. Thanks to staff funded by the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant, this is possible.

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control Office of Chronic Disease Epidemiology collected and analyzed data that helped the agency establish the need for the program, which addresses women's multiple health needs such as quitting smoking; reducing heart disease, stroke and diabetes risk and improving diet and physical activity. The epidemiologist:

- Retrieved, analyzed and reported relevant data such as stroke, heart disease and diabetes mortality and prevalence rates; hospital inpatient and emergency room admissions and costs; and obesity prevalence and lifestyle habits;
- Collaborated with chronic disease program staff to develop program goals; and
- Developed evaluation strategies and data collection protocols.

Impact

In July 2008, South Carolina received the go-ahead to implement a statewide WISEWOMAN program. Since 2000, WISEWOMAN nationally has created the following results:

- More than 72,000 women have been screened, identifying more than 7,300 cases of previously undiagnosed high blood pressure, more than 7,500 cases of undiagnosed high cholesterol, and more than 1,000 cases of undiagnosed diabetes;
- The program also has provided more than 170,000 lifestyle intervention sessions since 2000. Tobacco quitline referrals and smoking cessation intervention sessions offered through WISEWOMAN have contributed to an average quit rate of eight percent among smokers after a year.

The number of women potentially eligible for this program in South Carolina could be as high as 60,000 to 70,000 in the targeted regions. Without statistics and data analysis from the epidemiologist, grant funding for this program would not have been possible. The epidemiologist will continue to work with the WISEWOMAN program to monitor evaluation activities, update and fine-tune strategies as needed, and monitor annual surveillance data to track effectiveness.

Contact: Patsy Myers, DrPH

S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control

1800 St. Julian Place, Columbia S.C. 29204 (803) 545-4933,

Myerspm@dhec.sc.gov